

# NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office  
St. Petersburg, FL

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The "News and Notes for Florida Veterans" is published monthly by the Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg, Florida, to provide information on VA benefit programs to veterans and dependents in Florida. The material presented does not have the effect of laws or regulations. Please send questions or comments on this newsletter to Veterans Service Center, ATTN: "News and Notes," PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731. We do not have the resources to maintain a mailing list for distribution to individuals; however this newsletter is available on the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office web site at [www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete](http://www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete).

**VA ASSISTS FLORIDIANS IN RECOVERY** (VA News Release August 19, 2004) WASHINGTON – Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi has ordered his department to offer "whatever assistance necessary" to Floridians in the aftermath of Hurricane Charley. "These are our neighbors, and as in the past, we are there for them now," Secretary Principi said.

The efforts underway by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) include augmenting local hospitals with about 50 VA health care workers; working with lenders to establish a moratorium on foreclosures in the affected areas for veterans with GI Bill home loan guarantees; making VA home loan representatives available to provide financial counseling to veterans affected by the hurricane; and offering foreclosed properties in Florida to the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) to temporarily house hurricane victims.

In Florida, employees at VA facilities are also pitching in to help victims of the hurricane by collecting donations for disaster area residents, including non-perishable food, personal hygiene items and gift certificates to local businesses.

Among VA medical facilities in the area, the Port Charlotte outpatient clinic has been closed because of roof damage, and VA officials are considering the temporary transfer of 56 patients from Port Charlotte state veterans' nursing home to other facilities in the region because of electrical problems.

Through the local news media, VA is also reaching out to victims by providing them with information about VA benefits and services available to veterans and their families during this difficult time.

## **DISASTER RELIEF PAYMENTS AND VA PENSION**

Voluntary payments in the nature of relief after widespread national disaster such as floods and hurricanes are considered to be welfare and are not countable as income for VA Pension purposes. This exclusion does not apply to disaster relief payments made in a commercial context (for example, drought relief to farmers).

**COST OF LIVING ADJUSTMENT (COLA)** Legislation authorizing the cost of living adjustment (COLA) for VA Compensation and Dependency and Indemnity (DIC) awards has been passed by the House (HR 4175) and is pending in the Senate (S 2483). The legislation calls for VA benefits to be increased by the same percentage as the percentage by which benefit amounts payable under Social Security are increased effective December 1, 2004, based on the Consumer Price Index. The Consumer Price Index comes out around the middle of October, so the amount of the increase will not be known until then. The increased rate will appear in the checks dated 12-31-2004 for the month of December, 2004. All beneficiaries will be informed of the new rate by letter.

**VA NAMES DIRECTOR OF NEW NATIONAL CEMETERY IN SOUTH FLORIDA** (VA News Release August 24, 2004) WASHINGTON -- The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has selected David Wells as the first director of a new national cemetery to be built in South Florida. Mr. Wells has been the assistant director at Florida National Cemetery in Bushnell since 1995.

The national cemetery land is in Palm Beach County, 19 miles northwest of Boca Raton. Construction likely will begin in June 2005, with burials beginning in August 2005 in a small section during construction. Information on the South Florida-area national cemetery is available by calling the VA Memorial Service Network in Atlanta at 404-929-5899.

## **VETERANS PREFERENCE IN FEDERAL EMPLOYMENT** **General Requirements for Preference:**

To be entitled to preference, a veteran must meet the eligibility requirements in section 2108 of title 5, United States Code. This means that: an honorable or general discharge is necessary; military retirees at the rank of major, lieutenant commander, or higher are not eligible for preference unless they are disabled veterans; and Guard and Reserve active duty for training purposes does *not* qualify for preference. When applying for Federal jobs, eligible veterans should claim preference on their application or resume. Applicants claiming 10-point preference must complete form SF-15, Application for 10-Point Veteran Preference.

**5-Point Preference:** Five points are added to the passing examination score of a veteran who served: during the period December 7, 1941, to July 1, 1955; or for more than 180 consecutive days, any part of which occurred after January 31, 1955, and before October 15, 1976; or during the Gulf War from August 2, 1990 through January 2, 1992; or in a campaign or expedition for which a campaign medal has been authorized, including El Salvador, Grenada, Haiti, Lebanon, Panama, Somalia, Southwest Asia, Bosnia, and the Global War on Terrorism.

Medal holders and Gulf War veterans who enlisted after September 7, 1980, or entered on active duty on or after October 14, 1982, must have served continuously for 24 months or the full period called or ordered to active duty. The service requirement does not apply to veterans with compensable service-connected disabilities, or to veterans separated for disability in the line of duty, or for hardship.

**10-Point Preference:** Ten points are added to the passing examination score of a veteran who served any time and who (1) has a present service-connected disability or (2) is receiving compensation, disability retirement benefits, or pension from the military or the Department of Veterans Affairs. Individuals who received a Purple Heart qualify as disabled veterans. Also entitled are unmarried spouses of certain deceased veterans, a spouse of a veteran unable to work because of a service-connected disability, and a mother of a veteran who died in service or who is permanently and totally disabled.

Application for Veterans Preference is made by completing the appropriate blocks on the Standard Form 171, Application for Federal Employment. For more information, see the Office of Personnel Management web site at <http://www.usajobs.opm.gov/EI3.asp>.

**NATIONAL POW/MIA RECOGNITION DAY** This commemoration is set aside to honor the commitment and the sacrifices made by this nation's Prisoners of War and those who are still Missing in Action, as well as their families. By custom, it is often observed in Pentagon ceremonies on the third Friday in September. However, it has been moved in the past to avoid conflicts with religious observances. In 2004, it will be observed on Tuesday, September 14, 2004, out of respect for Rosh Hashanah. National POW/MIA Recognition Day is one of the six days specified by law on which the black POW/MIA flag shall be flown over federal facilities and cemeteries, post offices and military installations.

#### **IMPORTANT DATES IN SEPTEMBER**

**September 1** payments for August due

**September 6** Federal holiday - Labor Day

**September 9** last day to input change of address or establish direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 10-01-2004 payments

**September 14** National POW/MIA Recognition Day

**September 22** last day to change or cancel direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 10-01-2004 payments

#### **VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:**

**VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg** - PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731 **1-800-827-1000**

**Regional Processing Office, Atlanta, GA** (education claims) -

PO Box 100022, Decatur, GA 30031-7022

**1-888-GIBILL1 (442-4551)**

Telephone number for Chapter 30 self-verifications

**1-877-823-2378**

**Veterans Health Administration Toll-Free Hotline** (medical care) - **1-877-222-8387**

**VA EFT Information Hotline** (electronic funds transfer - direct deposit) **1-877-838-2778**

**VA Insurance Center, Philadelphia** (VA Insurance) - PO Box 42954, Philadelphia, PA 19101 **1-800-669-8477**

**VA Health Administration Center** (CHAMPVA and Spina Bifida health care) -

CHAMPVA inquiries: PO Box 65023, Denver, CO 80206-5023

CHAMPVA claims: PO Box 65024, Denver, CO 80206-5024

Spina Bifida inquiries and claims: PO Box 65025, Denver, CO 80206-5025 **1-800-733-8387**

**Foreign Medical Program Office** (medical treatment abroad) - PO Box 65021, Denver, CO 80206-5021 **303-331-7590**

#### **National Cemeteries**

10,000 Bay Pines Blvd N, Bay Pines FL **727-398-9426**

6502 SW 102nd Ave, Bushnell FL 33513 **352-793-7740**

Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL **850-453-4108/4846**

**National Cemetery Administration Office of Memorial Programs** (headstones and markers) - 810 Vermont Ave NW, Washington, DC 20420 **1-800-697-6947**

**Loan Guaranty Eligibility Center** (certificates of eligibility) PO Box 20729, Winston-Salem, NC 27120 **1-888-244-6711**

**Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) Unit** - Chicago VA Regional Office **1-800-829-4833**

#### **INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST:**

VA Web Site: **[www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)**

VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS) **<http://www.warms.vba.va.gov/>**

Property Management **[www.ocwen.com](http://www.ocwen.com)**

Florida Department of Veterans Affairs: **[www.floridavets.org/](http://www.floridavets.org/)**

